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Ohio State U. solar car project revs up

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(U-WIRE) COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Ohio State University's Solar Vehicle Team has begun planning the development of its next solar-powered car for a competition in the summer of 2001.

The car, Redshift IV, will be OSU's entry in the American Solar Challenge, a race running from Chicago to Los Angeles between solar-powered vehicles from universities across the country.

The American Solar Challenge of 2001 will be the fourth competition that the Solar Vehicle Team has been involved in. The team placed 11th out of 29 in their most recent competition, the 1999 Sunrayce contest from Washington, D.C., to Orlando, Fla.

The Solar Vehicle Team, based out of the Center for Automotive Research, has been engaged in developing more efficient use of solar power as well as experimenting with a number of other new technologies.

A change that is planned for the new car from last year's vehicle, called Redshift III, is switching the car's body material. The new car will use carbon fiber instead of Kevlar. Carbon fiber is heavier but stronger than Kevlar.

The team also plans to implement a new technique in designing and creating the body of the new car, where a computer guides a wire through Styrofoam to form the mold. This new technique would save a lot of time and effort from previous techniques and also make the body more perfect aerodynamically, said Annamalai.

The team is looking for graduate students in electrical and computer engineering to help

program the process, said Annamalai.

Team member Jason Peterson said that the solar vehicle program develops skills employers look for and gives valuable experience in engineering, business and teamwork.

"The whole purpose of the solar vehicle is to gain experience," Peterson said. "We make our own circuit boards, build the electrical system and everything. The experience that I and other team members get is something that employers really look at."

Funding is an important element to the building of the next solar car and the team is actively seeking commercial and public sponsorship. The 1999 Redshift III was estimated to have cost approximately $100,000.

To help fund this project, team members have created the Sponsor-a-Cell program, where those interested in helping can sponsor one or more of the 800 individual solar cells for $25 per cell. The cost includes the purchase of the cell itself as well as tabbing, lamination and mounting. Sponsors receive a certificate and a map location the cell.

Those interested in sponsoring or joining the Solar Vehicle Team should e-mail the team at sunrayce@osu.edu or call 688-4084.